

**REMARKS OF
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to the
NEW YORK STATE MOTOR TRUCK ASSOCIATION
NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES
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Introduction

On behalf of President Bush and Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta, I want to thank you for inviting me to be here today. I always enjoy the opportunity to spend time with our partners in the states and with various organizations across the country.

The American economy has posted steady job gains for each of the last ten months, creating more than 1.5 million jobs since August. And it is the transportation sector that literally moves our economy. As many of you know, increased freight movement was one of the earliest signals of the strong recovery, and our Transportation Services Index continues to rise to record highs.

Partnership for Safety

Safety *is* our primary goal at the Federal Motor Carrier Administration and US Department of Transportation, and safety is the top transportation priority of this Administration. In 2003 we lost more than 43,000 people on our nation's highways. Of that 43,000, nearly 5,000 deaths were related to commercial motor vehicles.

The US DOT and the FMCSA are committed to reducing the fatality rate in all motor vehicle crashes by 41 percent from 1996 to 2008. Working together, we share this goal with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and Federal Highway Administration.

This is especially critical as we look at our nation's growing economy. The US annually moves more than 16.3 billion tons of freight, valued at over \$12 trillion. And, as the economy continues to take off, we project freight volume will increase by more than 50 percent in the next 20 years. So, we have a significant challenge in front of us. Working with all of you — our partners in the States — is vital to reaching our safety goal.

I'm pleased to say New York State has been a valued partner by providing this kind of support and cooperation. I want to commend the leaders of the Department of Motor Vehicles for contributing staff time, technical assistance and valuable expertise. DMV leaders chaired committees and working groups to help improve the CDL program. On behalf of everyone at FMCSA, I want to publicly thank and congratulate you for your outstanding work.

Today I want to talk about FMCSA programs that depend on our partnership with the States and industry, and recent developments.

CDL Fraud Prevention

The CDL program has been one of the lynchpins of DOT's efforts — and success — in improving truck and bus safety. We have invested a lot of time and effort in fraud prevention, and I think our collaboration with the States is really paying off.

Federal grants help New York and other States improve computer systems for communicating data on CDL driver convictions and disqualifications. We are developing a model law enforcement program for reducing CDL fraud. This effort is aimed at identifying those areas of the CDL program most vulnerable to fraud, and also at developing strategies to combat illegal activities. We've also revised the CDL skills test to improve efficiency and to provide examiners with more flexibility in the specific tests they administer.

Additionally, we've started a dialogue with the National Center for State Courts and the Conference of State Court Administrators. Our goal is to improve the accuracy, completeness and timeliness of transmitting CMV driver conviction data between the courts and the State licensing agencies. We must provide enough data so judges can give appropriate penalties to violators.

Recently DOT's Office of the Inspector General recommended that FMCSA require the States to verify a CDL applicant's citizenship, or legal residency, and Social Security Number. Currently, New York is one of 44 States that have established programs with CDL grant funds that are voluntarily verifying Social Security Numbers. So, we're considering next steps for creating a national standard.

Finally, I want to commend New York State for your leadership in conducting automated knowledge testing for CDLs. By eliminating paper copies and the need for language interpreters, this program is helping to protect against fraud and preventing cheating. New York is one of only 11 States that, as far as we know, are doing this. So, you're providing an important model for an improvement that offers valuable reinforcement to the CDL program.

Entry-Level Driver Training

Next, I'd like to discuss three recent rules that focus on driver training and safety performance. I think they reflect the kind of cooperation I'm talking about.

The first rule establishes minimum training standards for entry-level drivers of large trucks and buses — before they begin operating. This rule will boost the value of the CDL program by helping new CMV drivers to be better prepared.

These new drivers must receive instruction in four areas: driver qualification requirements, hours of service, driver wellness, and whistleblower protection. We estimate that an average of 10.5 hours is needed for instruction on these topics. Once the training is complete, drivers must be issued a certificate to be placed in their employers' personnel files.

LCV Driver Training

The second rule establishes DOT's first minimum training requirements for drivers of doubles and triples — longer combination vehicles. It took effect at the beginning of June. This training is now necessary for LCV operators, even though they must also have a State-issued CDL with a double/triple trailer endorsement.

The required instruction covers safe LCV operating practices and non-driving activities, such as route and trip planning and checking of cargo and weight. Prospective LCV drivers must then pass a knowledge test, and their records must be free of major violations and license suspensions.

The bottom line is that LCV drivers now must have excellent records and the proper knowledge to operate doubles and triples safely.

Safety Performance History and Churning

The third rule, that took effect at the end of April, will help carriers hire drivers with the best possible safety records. It allows carriers to obtain more complete driver performance information so they can better assess the potential risks of prospective hires. The rule requires employers to review candidates' safety records, and former employers must make those records available within 30 days of an information request.

This rule also has the potential to address the increasingly important issue of job-hopping or "churning." High rates of turnover in the industry account for as much as 80 percent of the demand for experienced, qualified drivers. In addition to the substantial costs to the industry, the greatest impact of churning may be in safety.

FMCSA recently explored this issue by studying the link between churning and truck crashes. We found that a driver averaging 3 or more jobs with different employers has more than double the odds of being involved in a crash than drivers with lower job change rates. We think this information could be very useful for carriers as they scrutinize the driving history of potential employees.

Data Quality

One area where we have recently focused our attention is that of data improvement. Our enforcement efforts rely heavily on high-quality data to better identify high-risk motor carriers for investigation. Our objective here is to order poor and non-compliant safety performers out of

service *before* they cause harm. The more complete, timely and accurate our data is — and the more efficient our data collection and access systems are — the better our ability to *prevent* violations and crashes.

One of our primary tools for analyzing data — the Motor Carrier Safety Status Measurement System, or SafeStat — is only as good as the data it uses. By using a carrier's crash, inspection, enforcement, compliance review, and out-of-service data, it accurately identifies carriers that pose the greatest risk to safety.

However, SafeStat can be even better. Recently we assessed the States' safety data quality based on the timeliness, accuracy and completeness of crash and inspection information. Many States must make significant improvements in this area. In the past month, New York has taken an important step forward by uploading close to 2,000 truck and bus crashes from 2003.

Not only are we looking at ways to improve the quality and timeliness of safety performance data in the States, we're considering our own operations. We are particularly concerned about the crash data, since it has great impact on carriers. We have decided to temporarily remove the accident Safety Evaluation Area, or SEA, and the overall SafeStat scores from our Web site. This will provide time for the accuracy and timeliness of crash reports to be improved.

Carriers will still be able to access their own accident SEA and overall scores in the interim. In the meantime, we look forward to working with the state to continue this positive trend and improve the accuracy and timeliness of your data reporting.

Cargo Securement

Cargo Securement is another issue that has benefited from strong partnerships to create a program that is vital to improving safety. The rule, which is now nearly 2 years old, took effect at the beginning of this year.

This was the result of a comprehensive research program and collaboration of U.S. and Canadian industry experts, and Federal, State and Provincial enforcement officials. With guidance from these stakeholders, we're working to provide clarity on requirements for load limits, loading arrangements, sufficient strength of tie-downs, and commodity-specific rules for securing logs, paper rolls and intermodal containers.

Working with our partners, we're currently fine-tuning the U.S. regulations to be consistent with the Cargo Securement standards the Canadian Provinces will adopt later this year. In the coming months, we will work with the Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators and Provincial agencies on critical information exchanges for creating uniformity.

Safety Belts

Finally, I'd like to talk about safety belts. In 2003, 58 percent of those killed in passenger vehicles were not wearing safety belts. This underscores the value of the need for states to adopt standard safety belt laws.

We're proud that we have raised the national safety belt usage rate to 79 percent — the highest level ever. However, a recent study by FMCSA showed that only 48 percent of truck and bus drivers buckle up.

Last December, Secretary Mineta gathered with enforcement and trucking leaders to launch the broadest effort this country has ever seen to get truckers to wear their safety belts. We want you to partner with us in this effort. We ask for your help in getting commercial vehicle drivers to buckle up.

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I want to thank you for all your efforts in these many initiatives. Together we can improve safety, prevent crashes and save lives.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be here today.